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الإسلامي
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Statement by Mr Salem Azzam, Secretary General, Islamic Council, London, and former Saudi Arabian Ambassador, during the Sixth Islamic Summit Conference, held in Dakar, Senegal, 9-12 December 1991

I wish to draw your attention to the harrowing reports of the sufferings of the Iraqi people, especially new-born babies, infants, nursing mothers, the old and the sick, as a result of the economic sanctions imposed on Iraq following the Gulf war. These reports are based on visits to Iraq by representatives of international organisations such as the United Nations, the Red Cross, the Red Crescent, Oxfam, Harvard University, and politicians, media persons and people deeply concerned with human rights and humanitarian issues.

All the reports focus on serious malnutrition and the spread of life-threatening diseases such as typhoid, cholera, hepatitis, gastroenteritis, meningitis, etc, which have reached epidemic levels due to dangerous pollution of drinking water and serious shortage of medicines and drugs created by the sanctions.

After visiting Iraq, the UN Under Secretary General, Martti Ahtisaari, said: 'Nothing we had seen or read had quite prepared us for the particular form of devastation which has now befallen the country', and urged for the immediate lifting of the sanctions.

Following his summer 1991 visits to Iraq, Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, the UN Special Envoy to the Gulf, warned that food and medicines shortages presented 'a human crisis that could degenerate into a catastrophe' and urged the lifting of the sanctions.

A study organised in May 1991 by faculty members of Harvard University's School of Public Health estimated that some 170,000 Iraqi children would die by the end of 1991 from disease and the 'catastrophic breakdown of the public health care system' unless sanctions were lifted. A subsequent follow-up study reported that Iraq's child mortality rate had tripled and perhaps quadrupled as a result of the war and sanctions.

Dr Michael Viola, an American professor of medicine and microbiology who has visited Iraq said: 'A severe epidemic of several diseases is in progress and is being aggravated by malnutrition'.

Numerous independent witnesses have testified to the disturbing incidence of marasmus, a progressive emaciation from malnutrition, among Iraqi children. This condition they say was unknown in pre-war Iraq.

According to press reports and the testimony of Western witnesses, sanctions have caused an acute shortage of baby milk powder and nursing mothers are unable to breast-feed their babies due to their own malnutrition, resulting in many infant deaths. These reports also point out that due to the almost total destruction of the electric power system refrigeration necessary for the storage of drugs such as insulin, vital to the survival of diabetic patients, is not available, causing easily preventable fatalities.

The situation created by the sanctions imposed on Iraq is extremely grim and deteriorating daily. The Iraqi people are being deprived of their basic right to food and medicine and already tens of thousands have died. If further large scale deaths of innocent people are to be avoided, the sanctions must be lifted without delay.

I take this opportunity to appeal to the world conscience in general and to the participants of this Summit in particular to rise to the occasion and to spare no effort for the immediate lifting of these sanctions. Let it not be said that the heads of Muslim states participated in the great human tragedy that is being inflicted on the innocent people of Iraq by their failure to act decisively.